

WASHINGTON (April 26) – Congressman Spencer Bachus (AL-6) provided the following reflections as the State of Alabama remembers the tornadoes of April 27, 2011.

**The tornadoes that struck the State of Alabama with such destructive force on April 27, 2011 are vivid in our thoughts one year later.**

**We first remember the lives that were lost and disrupted in our state and throughout the Southeast. According to the National Weather Service, an incredible 62 separate tornadoes touched down during a fury that reached every corner of Alabama.**

**The devastation that I saw travelling through places both large and small like Pratt City, Pleasant Grove, Concord, Fultondale, Moody and the Shoal Creek community in St. Clair County, and the City of Tuscaloosa remains fresh in my memory today. But so do the works of charity and faith that I witnessed, and the resilience symbolized by the loving recovery of a U.S. flag from the rubble of Alberta Elementary School.**

**Alabama comes together during times of emergency. We had exceptional cooperation across all levels of government in the immediate aftermath of the tornadoes. The members of our congressional delegation united to request a federal disaster declaration that was granted almost immediately by the President.**

**What I will remember most, however, is how churches and volunteers came to the aid of their neighbors. Explaining why he personally paid for a large barbecue in Fultondale to feed weary storm victims, Jack Donovan told me, “It was not a choice, it was something that had to be done by those who can do it.”**

**Our spirit showed the best of Alabama to the nation.**

**A question necessarily asked after the tornadoes was, “How can we be even better prepared the next time that storms strike?”**

Governor Bentley's Tornado Action Recovery Committee, co-chaired by Pam Siddall and Johnny Johns, was a model public-private response and offered thoughtful and comprehensive recommendations. To those, I would add some observations based on issues that I've personally dealt with during the past year.

The value of community storm shelters has been demonstrated. The new shelter in Riverside and the many other shelters across Alabama saved lives. In my view, the construction of community shelters for schools and vulnerable areas should be prioritized over individual safe rooms as the most effective use of public hazard mitigation funding.

But with shelters, it is important to get the regulations right. What might make sense in Washington does not always make sense in local communities. We have worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to change rules that could have forced schools to demolish newly-built storm shelters and to provide that that shelter construction programs cover the cost of land acquisition.

Shelters are valuable only if people have time to get to them. The local media performed the highest level of public service with its storm forecasts and reporting, and community sirens also helped to sound alarms.

For those who do not have a television or radio turned on, or who are sleeping, a weather alert radio can be life-saving. The cost of a weather radio is small compared to the return on safety. In Congress, we are working on weather radio legislation for manufactured housing as an update to safety standards. Within a few years, technology will make mobile alerts through cell phones widely available.

Enhanced satellite forecasting technology is another important part of the picture. During a meeting at the National Weather Service office in Calera, NOAA Administer Jane Lubchenco alerted me to a potential coverage gap in bringing an advanced satellite online. We worked to secure congressional support for the Joint Polar Satellite System and NOAA is now planning for the transition to even more precise imagery. That, in turn, will lead to earlier and more accurate warnings.□

**In Alabama, we know that there will be tornadoes. We also know that with adequate preparation, we can save lives and help to minimize damage. Progress has been made in the year since a truly tragic day in the history of our state. But we cannot afford complacency and must never be afraid to ask the question, “What can we do better?”**

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